

# CONSUMERwise



The State of New Jersey ■ Office of the Attorney General

www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov



Division of Consumer Affairs

## HURRICANE IRENE

**NEWARK—** Extraordinary circumstances require extraordinary responses, and we've all lived through some extraordinary weeks since Hurricane Irene slammed into New Jersey in late August.

Hurricane Irene was an historic storm and her aftermath – hundreds of thousands without power, entire neighborhoods flooded and evacuated, roads crumbled, bridges washed out – left devastation that touched all of us. We remain in the recovery phase, with homeowners now focused on repairing and restoring their damaged residences.

The sad fact, as shown during past disasters, is that con artists target storm victims. The Division of Consumer Affairs is proactively working to protect those who sustained losses during Hurricane Irene, while working with law enforcement agencies to identify those who would attempt to defraud storm victims.

Teams of Division investigators have been going out into the field, disseminating helpful information at shelters and recovery centers, and to local police departments. The information includes facts about our Home Improvement Contractors' Registration Act and tips on how to find a reputable contractor.

Governor Christie has asked the public to report suspected price-gouging and other scams to the Division of Consumer Affairs. More than 100 complaints about

suspected price-gouging have been received to date, with each incident being investigated or under investigation.

While no price-gouging has been verified to date, Consumer Affairs has obtained more than \$8,000 in refunds or credit card charge-backs for consumers.

Weights and Measures officers cited three gas stations for raising prices more than once in a 24-hour period, in violation of the state motor fuels law. Two of these gas stations were inspected as a result of consumers who noted the price increases and filed complaints with us.



A crowd gathers to view flooding in Rutherford, N.J.

Photo courtesy of Jen Micco

In mid-September, we issued a warning about a "Financial Recovery Awards" scam mailing that was sent to homeowners in flood-affected areas.

Homeowners in Little Falls received a letter that begins, "STATEMENT OF YOUR BENEFITS," and states, "The Payment Security Administration (PSA) has determined that you shall receive entitlements and a Financial Recovery Award of

up to \$27,500.00."

The letter asks recipients to mail a "Benefit Consent Form" to a post office box in Canada, along with a "Processing Fee" of \$29.97 paid by check, money order, or credit card authorization.

The fine print on the back page includes language about sweepstakes rules. However, both state and federal law clearly indicate that sweepstakes are prohibited from requiring consumers to make a payment in order to receive a prize.

Consumer Affairs remains vigilant as the recovery from Hurricane Irene continues. Consumers who believe they have been cheated or scammed by a business, or suspect any other form of consumer abuse, can file a complaint with the State Division of Consumer Affairs by visiting its website, [www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov](http://www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov), or by calling 1-800-242-5846 (toll free within N.J.) or 973-504-6200. ■

### NEW JERSEY DIVISION OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

**Thomas R. Calcagni**  
DIRECTOR



*"With cooler fall weather here, it's time to get your wood-burning fireplace serviced to remove creosote buildup. If your fireplace or chimney needs repair, remember that anyone doing such work must be a registered Home Improvement Contractor."*

AskConsumerAffairs@dca.lps.state.nj.us



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## Gas Stations Cited



AVENEL –The owner of five gas stations with a history of motor fuels law violations in September was assessed \$5,000 in civil penalties for operating without Motor Fuels Retail Dealer Licenses and, upon payment, will be issued conditional license renewals that can be revoked, and his stations closed, if further violations occur.

The actions against Irfan Hassan are a coordinated enforcement effort involving the State Division of Consumer Affairs' Office of Weights and Measures (OWM) and the Division of Taxation within the New Jersey Department of Treasury. OWM officers check gas stations for compliance with state laws and regulations while the Division of Taxation issues the Motor Fuels Retailer Dealer License that each station owner is required to obtain.

Gas stations owned by Hassan have been cited and prosecuted by OWM officers for violations including co-mingling regular with premium grade fuel, which results in lower octane ratings; selling regular grade gasoline from a premium grade fuel dispenser at the premium grade price; and pump prices that do not match the prices displayed on signs.



**"Those who see fines as just a cost of doing business had better reconsider. If violations continue, the increased mandatory penalties for subsequent violations may result in the closing of the stations for a significant period," Attorney General Paula T. Dow said**

The Division of Taxation assessed \$1,000 in penalties, and upon payment, plans to issue a one-year conditional license renewal to the following companies owned by Hassan:

- ▶ Fidelity Builders, Inc., 1064 Ave. C, Bayonne
- ▶ Fidelity Builders, Inc., 248 Ave. C, Bayonne
- ▶ Friends Gas, Inc., 221 Central Ave., E. Orange
- ▶ Signature Fuels, Inc., 339 Northfield Ave., W. Orange
- ▶ Signature Fuel, Inc., 451 Irvington Ave., S. Orange

All of the stations at these locations are Delta gas stations.

Motorists can report suspected violations to the State Office of Weights and Measures by filling out a complaint form located at [www.nj.gov/oag/ca/complaint/ocp.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/oag/ca/complaint/ocp.pdf) or by calling the Office at 732-815-4840. ■

## Immigration Fraud

NEWARK –The Division of Consumer Affairs filed administrative complaints against four allegedly fraudulent immigration service providers, with each accused of falsely advertising that it had been authorized to prepare immigration documents on behalf of clients.

Only attorneys, or certain other accredited representatives authorized by the federal government, may file legal documents such as immigration forms on a client's behalf. The four businesses, in Passaic and Hudson counties, allegedly employed individuals who were not attorneys to perform this type of legal work.

The individuals who worked for the four businesses were, or claimed to be, notaries public. Each of the businesses is accused of attempting to capitalize on confusion about the powers of a notary public in the United States. In certain Latin American countries, "notarios publicos" may act as attorneys, prepare legal documents on behalf of clients, and provide legal advice. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) specifically warns immigrants that notaries public, "immigration consultants," or other such businesses cannot provide legal advice regarding immigration or prepare legal documents on behalf of clients – although many claim the authority to do so.

The following four businesses are each ac-

cused of violating New Jersey's Consumer Fraud Act and advertising regulations by misleading consumers into believing those businesses had been authorized to provide legal advice regarding immigration, and to prepare and file legal documents with USCIS, when they were not authorized to do so; and charging hundreds of dollars for the preparation of USCIS legal documents, when they were not legally permitted to charge such fees:

- ▶ Beltra's Agency, of Clifton, and its owners Beltra Gomez, Hector Gomez Jr., and Henry Gomez;
- ▶ Corazon Travel Agency, t/a Corazon Agency, of Paterson, and its owner, Rafael Garcia;
- ▶ Helping Honduras, Inc., d/b/a/ Helping the Immigrant Community, of Union City, and its corporate secretary and program director, Blanca Hilda Cardenas;
- ▶ Kingdom Vision Service Corporation d/b/a Kingdom Vision Multiservice, of West New York, and its president, Denise Perez.

Each of the four businesses allegedly placed Spanish-language advertisements in newspapers, offering immigration services, or offering help with "naturalization." ■

## License Suspensions

TRENTON – The State Board of Medical Examiners in September temporarily suspended the licenses of three North Jersey physi-

cians after each was arrested and criminally charged by law enforcement agencies in three separate and unrelated cases.

The physicians agreed to the temporary license suspensions in lieu of formal disciplinary hearings before the Board. The suspensions remain in effect pending further action by the Board.

Demesvar A. Jean-Baptiste, 38, of Watchung, was charged with burglary, making terroristic threats, and aggravated assault. He also failed to comply with an April 2011 Consent Order with the Board that allowed him to remain in practice – subject to monitoring and other conditions – while he was entered into the Professional Assistance Program.

Eugene Demczuk, 66, of Livingston, was charged with conspiracy to distribute Oxycodone and distribution of Oxycodone without a legitimate medical purpose.

Priscilla G. Ilem, 84, of Wayne, was charged with issuing prescriptions for a controlled dangerous substance (Oxycodone) without a legitimate purpose. ■

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